

5 February 1979

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SS9/SS18 (orig under)

CIA 4-02 SS18

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The Soviet Strategic 'Advantage'

The closer we get to a new SALT II agreement, the more popular it becomes to play war games with the present and future capabilities of U.S. strategic weapons and those of the Soviet Union. Who wins these war games depends, obviously, on what's being counted in—or out. When the agreement's critics are playing, quite naturally, the Russians always win.

But that's in large part due to the fact that, in the critics' calculations, key elements in the U.S. force are conveniently forgotten or underplayed. We have seen good examples of this in two recent critical analyses of the pending SALT agreement. Or perhaps I should say one-and-a-half recent analyses, because the second fed on the first for a good part of its information.

The first was the Dec. 30, 1978 lead editorial in the prestigious Economist of London, which proposed that the period covered by SALT II "could be the beginning of seven singularly dangerous years" because of what it alleged were serious Soviet advantages over the United States.

The second was a Jan. 22, 1979 Newsweek column by George Will which, using selections from the Economist article, went on to say that Soviet weapons development since the mid-1960's had gone on unanswered by the United States.

Both of these analyses of strategic forces give the Soviets more and the United States less than each deserves.

The Economist, for example, focuses on three "large future problems" for the United States.

The first is the "large imbalance in Russia's favor described in part as "... by 1985 the United States will be behind Russia both in the overall total and in the most important sub-categories" of missiles. The "most striking example is 'modern large' missiles where the Russians will be allowed to keep their 308 huge 10-warhead SS18s but the Americans will have none at all."

To start from the last first, the Soviets do not now have "308 huge 10-warhead SS18s," and they probably never will.

The most recent intelligence reports indicate slightly more than 100 SS18s existed after four years of installation, and a good number of them had only one warhead. U.S. intelligence experts expect that SS18s may eventually take the place of all the 308 SS9s that once existed, but there is no certainty of that. And as for the warheads, two of the three versions of the SS18s have only one warhead, and though the 8-10 warhead version is expected to be the "largest number" deployed, it will be far from the only one.

The United States has never had a "modern large" missile such as the SS9 and its successor, the SS18—but that was because it chose not to build one. That choice still stands. Even the proposed MX ICBM would be "small" by these standards.

Where the Soviets went for big rockets that could deliver heavy warheads, U.S. advanced technology permitted small, more accurate warheads to be built.

As U.S. missile accuracy increases, the need for a large warhead—which always was marginal in these most powerful of weapons—diminishes to almost zero. A 350-kiloton warhead delivered on target will destroy an enemy missile silo just as well as a two megaton warhead that is 10 times larger.

The Economist then enlarged the Soviet advantage by presenting a 1985 estimate of the total amount of destructive power that could be dropped on the United States, deriving from it advantages such as "a lead of 3 to 2 in their ability to destroy protected targets."

At a time when either side, because of accuracy, would need only one or two missiles to knock out the other's missile silo, what difference will it make if they have three to do that job and we have two?

Finally The Economist points to the political advantages to the Soviets "even if these figures [on missiles] were not militarily important..." If American nuclear power, it says, "is seen to be getting smaller than Russia's"—thanks in part to faulty analyses such as this—"public opinion in these allies will grow more nervous... and nervousness could crack the alliance."

Of course, in making the United States weak, The Economist left out the one major missile area where the United States remains far ahead—total warheads.

Its numbers analysis also totally ignored the vast qualitative advantage of U.S. nuclear subs over Soviet versions and the U.S. bomber fleet armed with cruise missiles.

The second, "and most dangerous place for... mistrust to grow" over SALT II, according to The Economist, is the fact that the treaty doesn't say anything about Soviet SS20 missiles aimed at Western Europe nor Russia's "Europe-busting (Backfire) nuclear-bombing aircraft."

The editorial also reports the SALT II three-year limitation on deployment of a ground-

The Hard SALT Sell

(orig under
SALT)

With the negotiators still off in Geneva dickering about the last details, Washington was girding last week for what one White House hand calls the World Series of world affairs—the coming Senate debate over a new strategic arms limitation treaty with Moscow. Jimmy Carter has proclaimed SALT II his first foreign-policy priority for 1979, and has already begun what promises to be the hardest sell of his Presidency to put it across. But the hawks in Carter's own party were grumbling, the Republicans were threatening to make the treaty a partisan issue—and Carter's own people were reduced to arguing on faith that it will pass because it should.

The portents were otherwise as doleful for Carter as his most optimistic early head count: 40 votes for SALT II of the 67 needed to ratify. The President is himself in weakened shape going into battle; a new NBC News-Associated Press poll gave him a good-to-excellent rating of only 28 per cent—a bare 2 points better than his pre-Camp David low. He is, moreover, trying to sell a treaty that does not exist and may slide for weeks or months more, given the Kremlin's pique over America's flowering romance with China (page 53). The conviction growing in the White House is that time is running out—that the Administration must bring home an initialed treaty by mid-April or risk its getting fatally entangled in the Presidential politics of 1980.

Partisanship: The entanglement may have begun already. Meeting in Easton, Md., as last week began, a conclave of 95 Republican senators, congressmen and state officeholders voted overwhelmingly to suspend even lip service to bipartisanship in the SALT debate and make it a wide-ranging assault on Carter's conduct of U.S.-Soviet affairs. The White House sniffed suspiciously at the lead role played by Senate Minority Leader Howard Baker, who would like Carter's job and needs Presidential-size issues. But the threat to SALT II and to Carter's future lies at least as much within his own party, whose hawkish right wing shares the view that the treaty cannot be considered in isolation from Soviet provocations around the world—and should not be ratified unless Moscow backs off.

Carter nevertheless has some strong hole cards to play, and has begun playing them in an aggressive SALT-selling campaign without waiting for the treaty. The strongest is that SALT II, in contrast to the Panama Canal accords, starts with overwhelming public support—a rousing 81-14 landslide in the NBC-AP poll. “It is,” says press secretary Jody Powell, “an amazing position for this Administration to be in—going into a tough fight with public opinion on our side.” The further White House case will be that a “yes” vote is not only popular but right—a vote to contain the arms race and the danger of a nuclear war. “If we play this right,” one Carter strategist says, “senators who vote against us will have to justify a ‘no’ vote. No one wants to be responsible for the spread of nuclear weapons.”

But not many want to be thought soft on the Russians or on national security either. Both sides are accordingly braced for a long, smoky debate turning less on the arcana of MIRV ability and megatonnage than on these decisive issues:

■ **THE LINKAGE QUESTION.** The Administration has argued from the first that SALT II is critical enough to be considered on its own merits, and should not be linked to an end to Soviet mischief-making from Cuba to Cambodia. But the Republicans assembled in Easton last week demanded that the debate spread out over “the total military and foreign-policy relationship” between the two superpowers—a signal to Carter and the Russians alike that, in Baker's words, “linkage is a fact of life.” Even friendly Democrats have borne similar warnings to the President; one indeed counseled him privately that the only way to “disarm” linkage may be to embrace it—by getting across to the Soviets' Leonid Brezhnev that the treaty will fail unless Moscow behaves.

■ **THE VERIFICATION QUESTION.** The issue of how the U.S. can check up on Soviet compliance with SALT has been sticky from the first and has lately been complicated by the possible loss of supersophisticated monitoring outposts in Iran. The White House, aware that it cannot sell a treaty bottomed on good intentions, will instead flood the Senate with evidence of

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